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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1346  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0007  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2579  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2409  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0724  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3312  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0001  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000831

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, IO, DRL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KTIA](#) [MOPS](#) [ELAB](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: CAMBODIA RECALLS AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND BUT  
EMPHASIZES OPEN DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS, GOOD SECURITY, CALM  
BORDER

REF: A. PHNOM PENH 815

[1](#)B. PHNOM PENH 811

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2746

PHNOM PENH 00000831 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION THEODORE ALLEGRA, FOR REASONS 1.  
4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) recalled its Ambassador to Thailand You Ay on November 5, emphasizing reciprocity in response to Thailand's earlier removal of the Thai Ambassador to Cambodia -- noting specifically that Cambodia was willing to restore full relations as soon as the Thai Ambassador returned to Phnom Penh. The RGC defended the appointment of former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as an economic advisor to Prime Minister Hun Sen (Ref A) and reiterated international legal arguments refuting Thai claims regarding Thaksin's extradition. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Council of Ministers Sok An said in a televised news conference that the mutual recalls would have no effect on Cambodia's overall relations with Thailand, especially the good bilateral economic ties. Mindful of Phnom Penh's violent anti-Thai riots in 2003, RGC officials highlighted normalcy and said they would keep people safe and sound. As the Independence Holiday weekend approached on November 6, Border checkpoints remained open, Thai Embassy staff felt safe, and the situation near Preah Vihear was calm. Thaksin is reportedly in Dubai and, if he does decide to visit Cambodia, indications are it will be for a short stay only.  
END SUMMARY.

An Ordinary Appointment and a "Strange" Protest  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) DPM Sok An's press conference, carried live by many national television stations November 5, cited as "strange" the protest by Thai leaders to the appointment of Thaksin as PM Hun Sen's economic advisor (Ref A). Recounting that Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban had said that it was an ordinary matter for the Cambodian PM to choose his personal advisors, Sok An noted that Hun Sen many years ago had appointed current Korean President Lee Myung-bak to a similar role. On the other hand, the recall of ambassadors would not affect people-to-people relations between Cambodians and their Thai neighbors, said Sok An. He emphasized that relations along the border would remain good

and that the diplomatic tiff would not affect strong bilateral economic relations. No mention of Thaksin's status as a fugitive from Thai justice came up in the news conference. A day earlier, on November 4, the RGC had issued a statement on Thaksin's appointment and the international legal norms that could justify the denial of an extradition request based on its underlying "political" nature. Sok An's aide noted that the DPM's aim in the press conference was to cool down the situation and ensure public safety.

#### Mixed Reactions; Concern for Residents' Security

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13. (SBU) Ou Virak of the Cambodian Human Rights Center told Radio Free Asia that the appointment of Thaksin appeared to be related to Cambodia's dispute with Thailand over the Preah Vihear border issue. He speculated that relations would return to normal in time. Political Scientist and Royal University of Phnom Penh Professor Ros Chantrabot agreed, and told us that Hun Sen's bold move was calculated to press the Abhisit government for a solution to the Preah Vihear issue, after which the "problem of Thaksin" would go away. Much Cambodian reaction to the diplomatic spat centered on the fate of over 60,000 legal Cambodian laborers believed to be in Thailand (9,371 legalized and 52,635 with work passes) in addition to tens of thousands more on the parallel economy. Sam Rainsy set the figure at 200,000 and told the local press he was concerned for their protection if tensions continued to escalate. The labor ministry office handling overseas workers was taking a wait-and-see attitude before issuing more work documents to those going to Thailand.

#### Business as Usual at Thai Embassy

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14. (SBU) Contacts at the Royal Thai Embassy in Phnom Penh said that the Embassy remained open for business as usual, with all staff present under the direction of the current Chargé. He said that general communication with the RGC remains normal, noting for example that he and the Cambodian MFA's Thai Desk Officer have been in regular contact since the recall. He said that the embassy had not been given guidance on how long Ambassador-designate Prasas Prasavinitchai would remain in Bangkok, repeating the Thai MFA's statement that the RGC would have to choose between dealing with Thaksin or the Thai government.

15. (C) Thai Embassy officials and our own U.S. Embassy mobile patrol confirmed an upgraded Cambodian police presence November 5 in front of the Thai Embassy until approximately 10:00 PM. The Thai Embassy officials also emphasized they had not requested any special security support from the RGC, and that the embassy had no major security concerns, although it had increased some of its internal security procedures as a precaution. (NOTE: We understand evacuation procedures via Thai military have been reviewed. END NOTE.) Poloff confirmed that the Cambodia police had since withdrawn from the Thai embassy, and that the situation on the street is calm. The Ambassador polled other mission chiefs the evening of November 5, who indicated their perception that the RGC was serious about upholding its Vienna convention obligations to protect the Thai diplomatic personnel and premises.

#### Border Calm

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16. (SBU) Council of Ministers Spokesman Phay Siphon said late on November 6 that the situation in the vicinity of the Preah Vihear border dispute remained calm and that all cross-border checkpoints remained open. Embassy Commercial Assistant independently confirmed with border traders that checkpoints were open. Separately, LTG Chea Dara, Royal Cambodian Armed Forces Deputy Commander-in-Chief told the Khmer-language press that he was in telephone contact with

his Thai counterpart in charge of Thailand's Military Region 2 and that they had agreed that soldiers were not the means to solve the border dispute, which should be settled by diplomatic means. However, Chea Dara repeated the commonly heard phrase that Cambodian military would not allow the Thai to cross even one millimeter onto Cambodian territory. Srey Deuk, commander of Preah Vihear forces also noted the situation remained quiet, although his troops were on alert.

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